

THE NKUMU OF THE TUMBA

596 invading groups of kindred there was always one who was considered as the family head, and this man could claim the title of *mwana mukanda*, the owner of the land. Round this man the rest of the members of the family group clustered, and he had the general direction of their affairs. He could scarcely be termed a chief, having a personal oversight rather than exercising any wide authority demanding organizing ability and political acumen. The succession of *mwana mukanda* runs collaterally through younger brothers in the first place; hence if a first-born male happens to hold that position, the succession among his younger brothers is in the order of their birth. When these have all died the succession passes to the next generation. If all the males of a group die, it is possible for a daughter's son to leave his father's side in order to assume the position of *mwana mukanda* on his mother's side.

A *mwana mukanda* can delegate his duties as head to another member of the family, who is then termed *mwana a shu*, the husband of the settlement. For such a privilege payment is generally made to the *mwana mukanda*. Round these *mwana mukanda* and their immediate kinsmen others gathered, forming, it may be, another section of the same settlement, known then as an *akola*, or, if numerous, another settlement.¹

624 The *mwana mukanda* (or *mwana a shu*) hears and judges cases that come to him, aided
[59] always by a group of elders, and directs the activities of the settlement. However, this does not entirely satisfy the Tumbas; they want an *akola* also. The *akola* is chosen, not by the whole settlement, but by a single village, or it may be even one *akola* of a village. If the villages of a settlement were without an *akola* it would generally, but not necessarily, be the *akola* of the *mwana mukanda* which would lead off by seeking one out. The group desiring an *akola* are known as the *akola*, and they look about for a man of the same tribe but not of the same settlement or village, to consider. He must be a man of some wealth, for actually he will buy his right of authority and pay heavily for it. If the man who is approached accepts, he is known from then on until his accession as *Nkomo Akola*, the term *akola* not being used until he is finally invested with the insignia of office, the *mwana*, or hat of special design. *Nkomo Akola*'s family is known as the *akola*, or *mwana*. This man, once having accepted the invitation to become *akola*, sets about amassing wealth in the form of wives and house lands. He may be poor about it, but he does not thereby forfeit his right to the office, nor apparently weary those who extended the invitation. Should *Nkomo Akola* die before he is installed as *akola*, or should he wish to withdraw from the honour bestowed upon him, the succession passes to another member of his *akola*. The succession would normally pass to the eldest male of the *akola*, but many circumstances may intervene to give it to another member of the family.

[78] A dream dreamed by a male of the *akola* to the effect that he should be the *akola* is sufficient to give him the right of succession over the eldest male. When asked whether it was common to be about such a dream having occurred, in order to gain the right of succession, those questioned replied the suggestion with emphatic negation, for this is no time to be; any man so doing would be sure to die, and the fear of death would deter him from such a course.

[68] ¹ When present, the formal chief set up by the Belgian Colonial Government are men chosen because of their right to be known as *mwana mukanda* or *mwana a shu*. Often, however, the *akola* are so well and being in relation that it has been necessary to set up chiefs artificially over *akolankola* very much larger than were their own subsidiary spheres of influence.

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74⁴⁷ crypts would then be heaped by mats in order to leave it as a hollow chamber, and the hole leading down to it filled in with earth.

74⁴⁸ For a month or two after the burial the festivities and orgies continued. Women
74⁴⁹ would be hanged to create some diversion, but those hanged were not eaten. Disgraces
74⁵⁰ would continue. According to the informants only slaves brought in from
74⁵¹ a distance would have to be tied to prevent their escape. The slave members of the
58⁵² household of the dead slave would await their turn anxiously, content to die that
[52] they might accompany their master in his journey to the land of spirits. This may
be true but scarcely seems possible. Still another diversion in the funeral orgies was
killing in the manner known as *csende*. If some man who had a slave did not
wish him to be hanged or beheaded, he might give him for this other method. As the
works slipped by, such a one, his life having apparently been spared, would suppose
that all was safe and that there was little chance of his being taken, and, thus
emboldened, would, instead of keeping at a safe distance, join the crowd to watch a
beheading. His death would be prearranged. At the moment of beheading a victim,
someone would drive a spear into the unsuspecting man, the whole crowd then
using spears and knives to stab and slash until he fell. Some might be tortured to
death by being buried up to the neck and left thus exposed to the hot sun without
food or water until death intervened, but this was not a common practice at such
funerals.

74⁵³ The termination of the dead slave's affair took place when the division of the
inheritance was made, a long and complicated process.

74⁵⁴ Such were the old days before European penetration. The advent of the white
man half a century ago was the beginning of the end. The communities had to be
given up, though reluctantly. Occasionally now guests are beheaded in place of
human victims, and many of the younger generation find that, even so, the sight is
more than they can endure, and they seek refuge elsewhere. *Nifame* are not anxious
for the humans. They find little or no respect paid to them by the government
officials and this is a distinct handicap to their obtaining honors from their own
people. When the slave incident in the village adjacent to the mission station died,
one of the Natives was asked who would be next. The reply was that probably no
one would appear as a successor. Asked why, he answered, "There are too many
cousins." He meant that too many were adopting the ways of the white man to
[54] make the inauguration of another slave a success. In his own useful function, that
of judge, the paramount chief now takes his place, even trial men he succeeded by a
clerk of the court, and fees paid into the treasury of the chieftaincy. With such a
change of affairs the old ways drop into desuetude, and the younger generation grew
up knowing less of the ways of their fathers as the years pass.